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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes pertaining to the situation of social groups

Statement submitted by the Foundation for the Rights of the Family, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Mainstreaming the family

A system that places people and their well-being and security at the centre of the social development process must necessarily focus on the family. For the family is the first link in the social chain, and if this first link snaps, the whole chain breaks.

Other issues in the field of social policy and development are maybe open to sectoral approaches; the family, however, as the unit involving individual members and performing, in interdependence and solidarity, such functions as caring, nurturing, education, clothing and housing, requires a global treatment and should therefore be mainstreamed into all issues related to social development and individual family members.

The Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development

An exhaustive survey of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action shows that the concern for a strengthened family was shared by the Governments attending the Summit.

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The Declaration affirms that the goals and objectives of social development require continuous efforts to reduce and eliminate major sources of social distress and instability for the family and society, and acknowledges that the family plays a key role in social development and as such should be strengthened.

With reference to the Copenhagen Declaration, the family, as an essential part of the social fabric, is relevant to all the issues contained in the 10 commitments: an enabling environment, eradication of poverty, full employment, social integration, gender equity, education and health, developing countries, resources and social development.

The Programme of Action calls for:

(a) A strengthened role for the family in accordance with the principles, goals and commitments of the Declaration of the World Summit for Social Development and those of the International Conference on Population and Development (para. 8);

(b) Analysing policies and programmes, and assessing their impact on families' well-being and conditions (para. 27 (a));

(c) Promoting family stability and supporting families in providing mutual support, including in their role as nurturers and educators of children (para. 39 (a));

(d) Making particular efforts to protect older persons, by strengthening family support systems (para. 40).

A declaration on the family

The family has been repeatedly referred to as the primary social unit in international instruments and documents.

It might be desirable to embody all these references and principles in a coherent and detailed declaration on family functions, responsibilities and rights in order to fill the now existing void in this field.

PRODEFA, therefore, welcomes the statement submitted by the delegation of Poland at the thirty-seventh session of the Commission for Social Development and at the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the special session of the General Assembly on the implementation and outcome of the World Summit for Social Development, with respect to the need to reopen the debate on the development of a specific international document on the family.

Consistent with all the above, we would suggest:

1. To mainstream the family into all United Nations programmes related to social development and to individual family members' issues and problems.

2. To implement, at national levels, policies that help families to carry out their functions. Special social support should be given to families with elderly, disabled or otherwise disadvantaged and vulnerable members.

3. To build strong societies based on the principles of social integration contained in the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, and to create conditions that will enable families, in their role as nurturers and educators, to assume their responsibilities and enjoy their rights.

4. To recognize that empowering families and supporting them in their functions is an investment in the well-being of the whole society.

5. To ensure that policies and programmes for families foster gender equity within the family and achieve a greater involvement of men in their family life and in child-rearing.

6. To acknowledge that the family is the place where intergenerational relations are more intense. Following the International Year of Older Persons 1999, 40 years after the Declaration of the Right of the Child and a decade after the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the importance of the interchange between grandparents and grandchildren should be emphasized.

7. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family 1994, some follow-up to IYF should be seriously considered. One of the features of an eventual follow-up might be a declaration on the family.